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Briefer: Sean McCormack, Spokesman

QUESTION: *The Washington Post* reported this morning on CIA running a ring of so-called black prison sites. Does Secretary Rice think that that's one of the best ways to proceed in the global war on terror? And what effect does this report have on Under Secretary Hughes' ability to reach out and look for support in the global war on terror?

MR. MCCORMACK: I read those same news reports and I think the reports discussed the CIA. I am certainly not in a position to confirm anything in those news reports and I think those questions about those particular news reports are best addressed to the CIA or the DNI.

Elise.

QUESTION: New topic or is there something --

QUESTION: No.

MR. MCCORMACK: I have a feeling others want to ask questions about this. Yeah. Why don't we go over here and I'll come back to you.

QUESTION: In those reports, though, they mention Eastern European democracies and, you know, with that in mind, how damaging could news like that be to U.S. foreign policy? I mean, the news is out there now so --

MR. MCCORMACK: Right. Again, any questions on this topic, I'm going to refer you over to the CIA.

Saul.

QUESTION: I think one thing we're interested in is the public diplomacy, the image of the United States involving such reports. We saw what can happen when reports cause a reaction over the desecration of the Koran.

The question originally was about Karen Hughes. Karen Hughes said that there were task forces around the world in embassies when the reports would come out then, the U.S. embassies would be proactive. They would get their message out. What are you doing to preserve the image of the United States amid this report? Does everyone in their embassy say, "Sorry, it's a CIA issue, you have to go talk to them?"

MR. MCCORMACK: I think that the general issue -- and again, I can't comment on the particular news report that you're referring to -- the general issue before us in the war on terror is how do we deal with individuals who are committed to violence, who are committed to the use of terror and killing innocent civilians, people who do not recognize

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any set of international standards or any set of international rules or any set of commonly accepted behaviors.

We, of course, as a signatory of the Geneva Convention, as well as others, need to -- since 9/11 searched for ways to apply those rules to a group of individuals who don't play by any rules. And, you know, these are tough issues. These are difficult issues and we have ongoing discussions on a variety of different fronts with countries around the world about these issues because the threat from terrorism and individuals who are committed to use of terror is a common threat to democracies and peace-loving nations around the world, including the United States.

Our view with regard to detainees at Guantanamo Bay is clear. Our policy is to treat all detainees in accordance with international obligations and the principles of the Geneva Convention. And detainees are provided with proper shelter, clothing, three meals per day that meet cultural dietary requirements, and medical care. Each detainee is also allowed to exercise his religious beliefs and those requesting them have been issued prayer beads, rugs and copies of the Koran. And we always strive for transparency in our operation at Guantanamo to the extent possible in the light of security and operational requirements. We have a continuous ICRC -- International Committee of the Red Cross -- presence at Guantanamo Bay. There have been numerous journalists who have visited Guantanamo Bay. Numerous foreign diplomats have also visited Guantanamo Bay. So you know, certainly, we understand that this is a difficult issue.

Our effort is to try to explain in as clear a manner what it is that we do at Guantanamo Bay, how we treat terrorist enemy combatants. And in those cases, like Abu Ghraib, where American soldiers are accused of mistreating detainees, that those allegations are thoroughly, quickly and transparently investigated. We have seen the military deal with a number of these cases in which those who have been found guilty of offenses, mistreatment of detainees, have been punished. And that is what we can do in terms of trying to explain the general issue, but also how our attempts to address the issue.

QUESTION: Well, why can't you talk more about the allegations of secret camps?

MR. MCCORMACK: Again --

QUESTION: I mean, you talk about the openness at Gitmo, but you don't want to talk about other allegations which are out there and which affect people around the world in Arab and Muslim countries that you're trying to convince you're doing the right thing there.

MR. MCCORMACK: Again, you know, I know the news reports. I've read them myself. And in terms of what was reported, it refers to the CIA, the intelligence community, and I'd refer all questions on that matter to the intelligence community.

QUESTION: Understood. But reports like this that are out there -- true, untrue -- can only make Karen Hughes' job that much harder. How does she deal with that then?

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MR. MCCORMACK: Well, I think that those -- what I was trying to answer Saul's question in talking about the issue that we face. The issue that we face, again, is how to deal with a group of people, with individuals who are committed to killing innocents, who follow no set of rules. How do we as a country of laws, how do we as a country that stands by its international obligations, how do we deal with it, with that problem? And you know, we've had lots of discussions, from here at the State Department, at the White House, at Department of Defense and Department of Justice and elsewhere outlining how we have -- our attempts to deal with that issue.

And what we can do, what Karen can do, what I can do, what others can do, is to try to explain the issue before us, before the world, and talk about how we -- the solutions that we have come up with at this point to deal with this problem. It's a tough problem.

QUESTION: You talk about transparency, and now, you know, we've just heard from Rumsfeld that you're not going to allow this UN team to speak to prisoners in Guantanamo. That doesn't look very transparent, does it?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, I guess appearances can be deceiving. I just talked a lot about who we have had visiting Guantanamo as well as who is there on a continuous basis. The decision that you talk about was announced by the Department of Defense but it was a government-wide decision and supported by the inter-agency.

The fact of the matter is, is that there is a continuous monitoring presence by the ICRC at Guantanamo Bay. They work very closely with the people running the facility at Guantanamo Bay to address any issues and concerns that may come up. We've had numerous foreign diplomats visit Guantanamo Bay as well. We have had many journalists travel down to Guantanamo Bay. So it is a place where we have made very real attempts, and I think very serious attempts, to open it up to the outside world.

Now, the Department of Defense can talk a little bit more and in more detail about the various restrictions that they -- and the reasons for the restrictions that they have for -- at Guantanamo. But the fact is there have been numerous visitors down there and there is a continuous presence down there.

QUESTION: The transparency applies only -- the transparency applies only to some detainees. The Red Cross does not have access to all detainees. Would you concede that?

MR. MCCORMACK: You know, again, what I can talk about, George, are the people being held at Guantanamo Bay.

QUESTION: Sean, the matter is not just for CIA -- the allegation of these secret prisons -- because the State Department is the go-between with foreign governments and you comment all the time on Gitmo issues and conversations that you have with foreign governments on that. So how can you refer everything to the CIA? And if this isn't true, wouldn't it be easy and quick for you to say it's not true?

MR. MCCORMACK: Again, I don't have anything to add on the issue.

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QUESTION: Well, it's not just a CIA issue.

MR. MCCORMACK: Again, I don't have anything else for you on the issue.

QUESTION: Another subject.

MR. MCCORMACK: (Inaudible) we'll come back to you, Saul.

QUESTION: Back to the rules and sort of these are people who have broken rules and how to deal with them. I mean, would you say that having secret prisons, which probably would break most -- most of the international community's sort of view of what -- of treating prisoners would be a wrong -- a wrong thing to do to have secret prisons with -- even if they have broken rules. In other words, it would be America breaking the international community's own idea of what convention is about the treatment of prisoners.

MR. MCCORMACK: Again, this is a way of getting back at *The Washington Post* story today and I don't have anything else to add.

QUESTION: Can you explain it probably from a different point of view, that the United States is not alone anyway? There are agreements with those countries to operate on their soil and having to run a prison or a facility like that for whoever is -- I mean, could you comment from the -- probably the international cooperation angle probably, this is the result of the war on terror, you know, and the cooperation on the international front?

MR. MCCORMACK: Good try. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: (Inaudible) specific thing on the State Department's reaction. The story came out late for most of us, but during daylight hours in Asia and Muslim countries in Asia. Were the public diplomacy task forces mobilized? Was there any order sent out to, okay, we've got this out, this is obviously going to be big news; it's not good, true or false, for our image; here's how you deal with it?

MR. MCCORMACK: We have had a number of efforts certainly over the past several weeks, and even extending beyond that to open up a discussion and have a discussion with the rest of the world, various publics around the world, about the issues related to detainees. And at this point, Saul, I don't have any particular information to guide you to on this news report, but it is a topic that we do try to provide our posts abroad the best possible information that we can so they can engage in a conversation on the matter.

QUESTION: Change of topic?

MR. MCCORMACK: Okay.

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